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○ AGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

by Brett Osborn, DO, FAANS, CSCS, & Jay Campbell

An unexamined life can cause as much damage as a poor diet and lack of exercise.

So you've been reading *Iron Man* and training hard for years now, and both your workouts and nutrition are dialed in. Members of the opposite sex are taking notice as your age-group peers slip into indolence and mediocrity. Congratulations! It took dedication, persistence, and laser-like focus to amass that lean muscle.

But there's more to life than exercise and the latest designer protein source. What about the other aspects of your vast life? What are you doing outside of the gym to enhance your vitality, nurture brain development, continue your emotional development, and concomitantly impede

the degenerative disease known as "aging"? Are your habits conducive to optimal health and longevity?

Here are five concepts, that when given appropriate attention, can dramatically improve your health, well-being, and longevity. Each of them demand some time and effort on your part, but will pay back that investment tenfold.

Sex Life: People crave sexual intimacy. It's built into our genetic machinery. Life often gets in the way, however, and desires sometimes remain unfulfilled amongst partners. Some may be satisfied (literally) with weekly intimacy, others not so

much. Regardless, become attuned to this frequency and make every effort to prioritize this often-lost physical aspect of your relationship. If need be, schedule time for sex. Mark your calendar with a weekly "date night" and allow yourself to be fully immersed in the experience. The moments after sex can be the most intimate, during which you can speak openly about your needs or feelings. It's cathartic.

Sleep: The importance of sleep can't be overstated. Obtaining adequate sleep is critical not only to brain but bodily health. Sleep clears the brain of toxic metabolites that are thought to be integral to the genesis of neurodegenerative diseases. Alzheimer's disease and age-related dementia are associated with sleep deprivation, as is obesity, which is proven to be related to chronically elevated cortisol levels. Poor sleep hygiene will retard your ability to recover from intense workouts. Without adequate sleep, you will fail to make expected gains and bring yourself to the threshold of overtraining. Even a brief foray into this accelerated state of aging, characterized by excessive free-radical release and unchecked bodily inflammation, can set your physical progress back months.

Make an effort to develop good sleep habits. First, shed any resident negative thoughts or emotions that may potentially disrupt your ability to fall asleep. Do not hit the sack harboring feelings of ill will toward your partner or co-worker. Have something to get off your chest? Don't procrastinate. Do it now! This eradication of consumptive thoughts will dramatically improve sleep induction. Next, disengage yourself from your network. Don't watch TV or browse on your iPad as you drift to sleep. Instead,

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Disengage yourself from your network. Don't watch TV or browse on your iPad as you drift to sleep. Instead, consider white noise, binaural beats, or sleep meditations to expedite your passage into dreamland.

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Positive Mindset: How do you tackle the rigors of everyday life? Are you focused or easily derailed when faced with multiple tasks? Do you perceive these as impasses or mere bumps in the road? Your response is dictated wholly by perception and attitude. The development of a positive and productive mindset requires practice. It is a learned response to adversity and reinforced by progressive, goal-directed resistance training. We all have bad days during which we feel overwhelmed by negative emotions. Those of us who can override these feelings of negativity, however, choosing instead to be positive and resourceful, will weather the proverbial storm. How do you prepare yourself for a big lift attempt? Do you think of a flower pasture? Doubtful. Most people conjure up images that stir emotions

(brain surgeons call this limbic system activation), and use that mental energy to vault performance to new heights. Just watch an elite powerlifter before attempting a new PR.

Apply this same principle outside the gym. Practice channeling negative energy into authoritative action. Eliminate thoughtless reaction. Life will often deal you a rough hand of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. See these as necessary stepping-stones to success as opportunities for advancement. Eliminate pitiful questions like, "Why me?" or "When are they going to stop doing this to me?" Instead, maintain a positive mindset in the face of adversity. Psychological stress, in addition to being a performance detractor, can also have deleterious effects on your body's biochemistry, compromising your immune system and predisposing you to a variety of ailments.

Stress Management: Life isn't stressful. Life *is* stress. Ask yourself: Are you managing your stress, or is your stress mastering you? A stressful existence accelerates the development of coronary artery, cerebrovascular, and other age-related diseases. Chronic stress kills, plain and simple. And it takes its toll surreptitiously, flying under the radar like a stealth bomber on a nighttime mission, wreaking havoc on the body without mercy. It is frightfully intangible. Stress is one of those "silent killers" like hypertension. It should come as no surprise to learn that these two disease states are so often associated with one another.

We challenge you to keep stress in check. Develop a well-conceived plan to address life's curveballs. Execute. Act. Don't react. Engage people who may have had similar experiences. Consider alternate stress management techniques. Meditate, take a nature walk, visit your place of worship, or help someone in need. Pay attention to those things for which you are grateful in this life.

Optimal Hormonal Balance: This is absolutely crucial for any aging man or woman. Without healthy levels of testosterone and estrogen, many will lack energy, focus and vigor, and experience a significant decline in lean body mass. Remember, one's resilience to disease is a function of your muscle mass. It's a fact that men and women face declining hormonal levels as they age. Does the aging process cause testosterone levels to decline, or is the aging process driven, to an extent, by declining hormone levels? No matter. Restoring hormones to optimal levels will dramatically improve mood, focus, and overall performance in many elements of your life. As a hormone-therapy patient and the author of the upcoming book *The Definitive Testosterone Replacement Therapy MANUAL: Your Blueprint For Body, Mind And Life Optimization*, I can attest to the improved quality of life from treatment by progressive and well-informed physicians.

All of the described lifestyle factors serve to optimize your biochemistry. Good sleep hygiene and sexual intimacy reduce the damage induced by elevated cortisol. Stress management helps quell bodily inflammation. Same for mindset training. The modalities you choose are personal, whether it is meditation, yoga, counseling, or even riding your motorcycle. If it'll accomplish the goal of mitigating the elements so integral to the aging process, then pursue it. Remember, health and longevity starts from the inside out. Ultimately it boils down to biochemistry. You just have to send your body the right signals. **IM**